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Socialist Studies No.3

OBJECT OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

A System of society alludes to the sum total of human relationships and is meant to distinguish us from those who seek to organise co-operative colonies, islands within a sea of capitalism. Socialism is not a colony, not a kibbutz but a system of society in the sense that capitalism, feudalism, and chattel slavery must all be characterised as systems of society. The term “*common ownership*” should not be confused with such phenomena as state ownership or “*public ownership*” terms used under capitalism to designate a more direct ownership of certain industries by the capitalist class as a whole. Common ownership implies the absence of ownership and we specify that this common ownership is to apply to the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth. We do not speak here of someone’s personal belongings as some not too discerning opponents of our case delight in inferring. “*Democratic control*” should speak for itself but the point must be made nevertheless, that in a society wherein the means and instruments of wealth production and distribution are commonly owned it is difficult to conceive of control other than democratic.

In order to rule out all possibility of misunderstanding it is necessary to indicate some of the consequences of establishing the socialist system of society summarised above. Production will be solely and directly for use of the whole population, with no buying and selling, no prices system, no rent, interest and profit, and the wages system will be abolished. Production and distribution will be on the Socialist principle:

“From each according to ability: to each according to need”. All will have free access to society’s products.

There will be no class division, no working class or owning class and no trade unions: there can be no trade unions because there will be no wages to bargain over and no employers to bargain with. Socialist society can only be world wide; humanity will not be segregated behind national frontiers or coerced by the armed forces of governments.

Presented with this statement of the socialist objective our opponents, including members of the Labour Party, some of whom claim to be Socialist, reject it as unrealistic or utopian. Members of the Labour Party may be reminded of their own founders including Keir Hardie, declared that it was to achieve just such a social system that they formed the Labour Party.

Why then do we hold that the establishment of Socialism is a necessary step forward for the human race? Our justification is twofold. Firstly, capitalism has raised productive forces to the level where Socialism is possible for the first time.

Secondly, we point to the failure of all non socialist remedies to achieve any worthwhile results. Liberal, Tory and Labour Governments in the past two hundred years have gone on promising to eliminate poverty, abolish crises and unemployment and save the world from war –all within the capitalist system. We have had capitalism with free trade and protectionism, capitalism with the British Empire and without, capitalism outside and inside the European Community and capitalism with and without inflation. And at the end of it all we see is none of the basic problems

solved.

Unless Socialism is established by the working class we face the indefinite repetition of all the past miseries. None of the other political parties can offer a way out.

SPGB: Principles and Policy

The media and the politicians tell you that the chaotic situation in Russia shows that Communism will not work and that Marxism is bankrupt. But what are their credentials and what kind of evidence have they for associating Marx with the Russian economy and calling it Socialism? Few of them have read Marx. Their opposition is based on lack of knowledge, like that of the students of economics who are advised not to bother with reading Marx's great work CAPITAL or like that of Harold Wilson former Labour Prime Minister who admitted that he could not get beyond chapter 1. Do they know that at the beginning Lenin himself described what he aimed at as state capitalism? They cannot even read the thirty pages COMMUNIST MANIFESTO in which Marx and Engels defined Communism as involving "*the abolition of buying and selling*".

Then there is Professor Milton Friedman, who understands so little of Marx's monetary theories that he told Mrs Thatcher that Marx was a monetarist like himself and Thatcher. And THE TIMES (30th August 1991) in a leading article, "*The Party's Over*", which dealt with the "*defection*" of thousands of members from the Russian Communist Party, and gave this misrepresentation of Marx:

"The first defector was Karl Marx himself, if Engels is to be believed. "All I know is I am not a Marxist", Marx wrote to his friend before his death in 1883".

According to Engels (see his letter to Conrad Schmidt, 5th August 1890), Marx did use these words but in a sense the opposite of that assumed by THE TIMES leader writer. Marx disowned some French self-styled "*Marxists*" who mis-stated his materialist conception of history. Marx was saying derisively, if that is Marxism then he was no Marxist.

Let it be emphasised, that in stating The Socialist Party of Great Britain's case we are not asking you to consider a social system that has already been tried. Socialism does not exist and never existed in Russia or any other country in the world. All the nations are economically a mixture of private capitalism and state capitalism (nationalisation as it is called in Britain).

The Socialist Party of Great Britain was formed in 1904 on the basis of the appended Declaration of Principles, acceptance of which was a condition of membership. These principles are in line with Marx's materialist conception of history, according to which capitalism is a stage in the development of society, following feudalism and in turn being followed by Socialism. Capitalism is a class divided social system with its consequent ceaseless class struggle "*between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess*" (Clause 2). The capitalist class are an exploiting class receiving, in the form of rent of land, profit and interest, part of the wealth produced by the wage and salary earners. But capitalism in its existence of about two centuries has brought about a development of transport and communications that has broken down isolation between populations, and has greatly increased the productive powers of industry.

It is however a central feature of capitalism that the products of farms, factories etc, are "*commodities*", that is to say that they are produced and sold at a profit. The market stands always between production and consumption, and for causes inherent in the structure of capitalism, crises occur from time to time, followed by periods of slump, in which unemployment rises to peak levels as sales and production fall. Capitalism on the productive side has made it possible to abolish poverty and provide adequately for the needs of all, but because of the dominance of the market and profit, the capitalist system has, as Marx put it, become "*a fetter on production*". It is in the interest of the working class and of society as a whole to abolish production for the market and replace it with production solely and directly for consumption, on the basis of free access without the need of the monetary system.

Socialist society will be able to increase hugely the production of socially useful goods and services because it will be freed from the necessity to maintain activities necessary only for capitalism; for example the armed forces and the millions of workers engaged in various financial transactions. The establishment of Socialism needs a Socialist majority, politically organised, using the vote to gain control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces. Socialism will of necessity be world wide.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has always opposed wars, on the ground that modern wars arise out of the constant conflict between all capitalist states over capitalist class issues, e.g. control of raw resources.

When the Party was formed in 1904 it introduced into socialist organisation two new principles. One was its rejection of the need for leadership. The second was that the Party did not have a programme of “immediate demands”. *“The Socialist Party of Great Britain is the Party with Socialism and nothing but Socialism as its Object”* (SOCIALIST STANDARD July 1911). The men and women who formed The socialist Party of Great Britain had been members of the Social Democratic Federation. One of the reasons for forming the new Party was that the SDF: *“was surely developing into a mere reform party, seeking to obtain the provision of Free Maintenance for school children”* (SOCIALIST STANDARD September 1904).

The Socialist Party of Great Britain is hostile to every other political party in the country *“whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist”*. That would be a natural attitude to the Tory Party, whose members claim that capitalism is the only possible system for the modern world, needing no more than periodical minor adjustments to handle new problems as they arise. It covers too the Liberal Democrats. Apart from differences about the governmental policies best suited to British capitalism their only distinctive claim is for elections to be held on a system of proportional representation, which would, they hope, give them some more seats on Parliament.

In the view of its members the Labour Party is in a different category: but it is in appearance only. Like the Tories and the Liberal Democrats they are committed to the continuance of capitalism. In their early years they talked about *“abolishing capitalism”* but all they meant by this was replacing private capitalism with nationalisation (state capitalism). Now they are less than enthusiastic about it. When British capitalism is under serious threat from foreign

The Scottish, Welsh and Irish Nationalist parties call for little comment. All they want is to have their private and state capitalism controlled locally instead of at Westminster, and to have their own tribal flags and ceremonies. The Green Party are supporters of capitalism like all the others. They are in the long line of reformers seeking government action to restrain the worst effects of unbridled profit seeking. Having popularised the issue of safeguarding the environment they are unlikely to become a large parliamentary party because theirs is the kind of programme all the other capitalist parties will take on board.

It has been traditional for the Labour Party to have yapping at its heels, so called left wing organisations abusing the Labour leaders and demanding bigger and quicker reforms of capitalism. At present, as a result of the collapse of Russian state capitalism they are in disarray and it will be some time until they regroup and decide what names to give themselves and what reforms to advocate. No doubt they will, as in the past, accuse the official leadership of the Labour Party of being worse supporters of capitalism than are the Tories and will then, at every election, tell the workers to vote Labour. They are of no importance.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain long ago made a valuable contribution to understanding the position, usefulness and limitations of the trade unions. As capitalist society is dominated by those who have effective control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces, it follows that if the capitalists with their greater financial resources decide to fight a wage claim to the bitter end, backed as they are by the government, they are bound to win. Hence the futility of prolonged strikes, with their cumulative loss of wages which the strikers can never get back from the employers. If the employers do not make concessions after a short strike it should be abandoned and the workers wait for more favourable conditions. When profits are high and rising employers, not wanting to see the flow of profits interrupted, will concede wage increases to avoid a strike. Periods of numerous and long strikes are periods of workers failing to get wage increases. Trade union action cannot establish Socialism and of course there will be no trade unions in Socialist society, the wages system having been abolished.

There remains the need to explain the present Socialist party of Great Britain, reconstituted in June 1991, came to be

formed by members of the old organisation, which now calls itself both Socialist Party and Socialist Party of Great Britain. After many years of adherence to the Party's Object and declaration of Principles and the achievement of a small but solid Socialist membership, the Clapham based organisation drifted into the adoption of reformist policies. The editors of the SOCIALIST STANDARD (April 1989) stated for example, that in publishing an indignant protest about the adverse effects of higher interest rates on workers with mortgages (and incidentally not mentioning that workers with savings in building societies and banks gained by a rise in interest rates), they "*were talking about effects in the very short term*", which is of course what reformism is all about.

They developed the argument that "*the object of the Socialist Party is to overthrow capitalism and establish a truly democratic society*" and therefore the Party should encourage workers to support "*democratic*" organisations such as the Solidarity political Party in Poland. the SOCIALIST STANDARD (January 1982) described it as a "*working class organisation*" and said "*by their actions the workers in Solidarity have won the admiration of Socialists*". It was never a trade union or any other form of working class organisation. Its membership was open to almost anybody and its "*demands were mostly for Labour Party type reforms*" (SOCIALIST STANDARD December 1982).

The argument is fallacious. There are no organisations which stand simply for "*democracy*". The organisations we are called upon to admire are ones with capitalist reformist aims, like Solidarity, which became the government of Poland in 1989.

The correct Socialist attitude was that adopted by the Party when the Russian Tsar abdicated and the government was taken over by democrats, "*Liberals*" and "*Social Democrats*".

"*we of the Socialist Party of Great Britain make it plain that we are not prepared to congratulate the Russian peasant upon assisting the Russian capitalist class to a more complete dominance*" (SOCIALIST STANDARD July 1917)

The aim of those who formed The Socialist Party of Great Britain in 1904 was to form a party of convinced socialists having as its only object the establishment of Socialism. In reconstituting The Socialist Party of Great Britain in 1991 our aim is the same.

MEETINGS

Sunday 20th October 1991 3pm THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY
Speaker: E. Hardy

Sunday 3rd November 1991 3pm THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT & THE ABOLITION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY
Speaker: R. Lloyd

Sunday 24th November 1991 3pm THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN & DEMOCRATIC REFORM MOVEMENTS
Speaker: K. Knight

Sunday 8th December 1991 3pm WHY THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN IS HOSTILE TO ALL OTHER PARTIES
Speaker: T. D'Arcy.

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The The Socialist Party's Anti-Marxist Friends In The Socialist Labour Party

The August issue of the SOCIALIST STANDARD, "*Official journal of the Socialist Party*", referred to the Socialist Labour Party of America as "*our political cousins in the USA*" It is additional evidence of how far the Clapham

based organisation has departed from the principles and policies of the socialist party of Great Britain, which, at its foundation in 1904 and for many years afterwards was in total opposition to the American S.L.P. and its main spokesman Daniel De Leon. The article "*What Next in Yugoslavia*", dealt with the communications problem the Yugoslavian government faced because of the existence of different groups of the population speaking different languages and described how the Tito dictatorship handled the problem. The article had this to say:

"Interestingly enough, our political cousins in the USA, the S.L.P. grappled with this problem in trying to spread the Socialist message amongst Balkan immigrants...so. perhaps forty odd years before Tito's similar efforts...a parallel development was brought about by the voluntary efforts of mostly self-educated working men and women".

What brought the S.P.G.B. into active conflict with the American S.L.P. at the beginning of the century was that, two years before members of the Social Democratic Federation left it to form the S.L.P., other members had left to form, in Scotland, the British S.L.P. modelled on the American party. Two issues prominent in the opposition of the S.P.G.B. to the American S.L.P. were their support for reforms and their eventual opposition to political action after having at first supported it. In 1905 the American S.L.P. supported the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and later broke away to form another industrial organisation. At the I.W.W.'s first convention Daniel De Leon, editor of the S.L.P. journal THE PEOPLE, and the author of several pamphlets sold by the two S.L.P.'s, stated the party's position:

"It does not lie in a political organisation that is a party to take and hold "the machinery of production".

And further:

"The situation in America...establishes the fact that "taking and holding" of the things that Labour needs to be free can never depend upon a political party".

(For further information on the SLP's opposition to political action see the SOCIALIST STANDARD, November 1930). The policy of the S.L.P. in the USA and Great Britain was dealt with in the S.P.G.B.'s MANIFESTO (second edition 1911, page 6), from which the following is an extract:

"In trade union matters the S.L.P. have blindly followed the lead of the American S.L.P. Contradicting their original teaching that political action was all-sufficing for the emancipation of the workers, they now try to found a British branch of an American Industrial union. They hold that Socialism will be achieved by "direct action" on the part of such a union. This is an Anarchist deviation. They do not accept the Socialist position of Marx and Engels that "the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy". The position of the S.L.P. is, in their own words that "the Socialists will not first "come into power" and then gain possession of the means of production; they will gain possession of the means of production through the Industrial Union and their "power" will result from that possession".

Then there is the question of programmes of reforms or "*immediate demands*". When the British S.L.P. was formed it had such a programme. Following criticism by the S.P.G.B. it was dropped, but the American party continued theirs. It had a list of 15 "*Social demands*" and a further list of six "*Political Demands*". The first list included a demand for the Federal Government to nationalise "*railroads, canals, telegraphs, telephones and all the other means of public transportation and communication*". It also included a demand for "*the united states to have exclusive right to issue money*". The second list demanded among other things, "*municipal self-government and proportional representation*". The aim of these 21 demands was "*with a view to immediate improvement in the condition of labour*".

The platform of the American S.L.P. opened with the following *high-fallutin* waffle:

"The Socialist Labour Party of the united states, in convention assembled, re-asserts the inalienable rights of all men to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. With the founders of the American Republic we hold that the purpose of government is to secure every citizen in the enjoyment of this right; but in the light of social conditions, we hold, further, that no such right can be exercised under a system of inequality, essentially destructive of life, of liberty, and of happiness" (A HANDBOOK OF SOCIALISM W.D.P. Bliss, 1907, pages 141-2).

For the Socialist party of Great Britain formed in 1904 there was no doubt or ambiguity about its total opposition to the S.L.P.'s anti political policy and reformism, as shown in the S.P.G.B.'s DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. It contains no list of "*immediate demands*" and it states in Clause 6 the need for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local.

The people who now control the Clapham based Socialist Party have changed all that. It was spelled out in the SOCIALIST STANDARD (May 1990) in an article headed "*An American Marxist*", which reviewed a book on DANIEL DE LEON by Stephen Coleman. The author of the article says of De Leon that he stood for the principle "*of Socialism and nothing but*", forgetting to mention the long list of immediate demands that De Leon campaigned for on the S.L.P.'s platform.

It says too that De Leon's "*distinct brand of Marxism and party organisation is still extant today*". His and the S.L.P.'s brand of "*Marxism*" were certainly "*distinct*" since it repudiated Marx's insistence on the need for political action for the conquest of political power, as set out in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO.

"The first step in the revolution of the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle of democracy".

Note

"If any individual is elected to office upon a revolutionary ballot that individual is a suspicious character. Whoever is returned elected upon a programme of labour emancipation; whoever is allowed to be filtered through the political inspection of the capitalist class; that man is a carefully selected tool, a traitor to the working class, selected by the capitalist class" (SOCIALIST STANDARD, November 1930).

De Leon and the S.L.P. backed up their anti-political attitude by claiming that Marx said: "*only the Trade Union is capable of setting on foot a true political party of labour and thus raise a bulwark against the power of Capital*". They were challenged repeatedly to say where Marx is supposed to have made this statement, so out of keeping with the published attitude, but failed to answer the challenge (See SOCIALIST STANDARD January 1930). It should also be observed that the S.P.G.B was not "*set on foot*" by a trade union.

The article in the SOCIALIST STANDARD (May 1990) said that the contribution to socialist thought of Daniel De Leon has been neglected over the years "*and that he influenced he founders of the S.P.G.B.*"). What contribution did De Leon make to socialist thought unless his to-ing and fro-ing over political action and his repudiation of Marx on political action can be regarded as a contribution? The article makes no mention of the numerous articles in the SOCIALIST STANDARD analysing and criticising De Leon and the S.L.P. the notion that a man and the Party, muddled, contradictory and reformist "*platform*", could have influenced those who drew up the lucid, compact, informative and logical S.P.G.B. DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES is laughable.

The article in the SOCIALIST STANDARD (May 1990) then lets the cat out of the bag by disclosing what the Socialist Party is now putting in place of the Marxist Socialist policy of the S.P.G.B.'s founders. It is "*Socialist Industrial Unions*", the policy of the two S.L.P.s. De Leon is quoted:

"He asserted the need for an economic wing of the socialist movement and put forward a three-stage theory of revolution: socialists winning the battle of ideas, victory at the ballot box, and socialist industrial unions supplying the economic might to enforce electoral victory and worker's power"

". It will be observed that this is like the policy of the British S.L.P. outlined earlier in this article, in the quotation from the S.P.G.B.'s MANIFESTO; but with a difference. In the British S.L.P. version victory at the ballot box will not come first. What will come first will be that socialists will first "*gain possession of the means of production through the industrial union*".

These views were discussed at length by the founders of the S.P.G.B. who realised the impracticality and dangers of the idea of industrial organisations attempting to seize control in the face of the agents of "*law and order*" including

the armed forces. Industrial unionism is now presented in the SOCIALIST STANDARD as if it was something not considered and rejected by the founder members.

It presents a problem for the Clapham-based Socialist Party. Logically they would need to adopt a new Declaration of Principles, particularly Clause 6. What about adopting the American S.L.P. platform quoted earlier, with its nonsense about “*The Founding Fathers*”? But they do have an alternative of carrying on as they have been doing for several years; that is keeping the old DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES unchanged but in practice behaving as if it did not exist.

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Declaration of Principles: Clause 4

That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex

Capitalism has not existed for all time but is the outcome of a process of social evolution. Starting with primitive communism in which property was held in common, followed in turn by the kind of society known in Greece and Rome, based on production by chattel slave labour, and by Feudal society out of which capitalism grew. In each of the societies after primitive communism there has been exploitation of one class by another but the form of exploitation has changed. The feudal serf was not “*owned*” as the chattel slave had been, but he was tied to the land of the manorial lord and under obligation to give unpaid work on the lord’s land while free to maintain himself by his labour on land under his control.

All past social revolutions, up to and including that which made capitalism the prevailing social system, created a new exploited class: now the capitalist class exploit the workers. It is true that alongside these two main classes there are other groups, such as peasants and the “*self employed*”, leading an often precarious existence. Once the means of production and distribution have come to be owned in common by society there cannot be any subject class to be exploited. Hence, in the words of Clause 4, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind “*without distinction of race or sex*”.

The evolution of property society reaches its limit with the advent of capitalism. The establishment of Socialism and with it the end of exploitation is the beginning of a new era in the history of mankind. The working class will therefore be the last exploited class to achieve its emancipation.

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Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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